

There is No Punchline by jockwitch

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Summary:

Coming out is hard. Arguably, fighting a nightmare demon alien clown is harder, but admitting you're gay to the people who are supposed to know you better than anyone? It feels like the hardest thing Richie's ever done.

There is No Punchline

Author's Note:

I've been in fandoms for 12 years of my life and I can't believe Stephen King's cocaine clown book is the thing that finally makes me bite the bullet and write fanfiction.

Title is from Tallahassee by The Mountain Goats, a very Reddie song off a very Reddie album

tw for: suicidal ideation, alcoholism, death, emetophobia, gore, homophobic slurs.

Buckle up folks, this is gonna be a sad one.

When no one asks Richie for the *why* of his token, he silently thanks whatever deity that's looking out for him that makes his friends not pry. Silently thanks Eddie, for using the rare moment of quiet to tease him about how long that's going to take to burn, because it's better than admitting what this little token represents. He can face his demons on his own, but giving it a name, letting his friends in on a 27 year old secret, is a whole other ball game. Especially, he realizes, as he watches each Loser put their token in, their stories are ones he is already familiar with.

It just wouldn't be fair, right before they have to kill this stupid fucking clown, to drop this bomb on them. What would he even say? Huddle them up, like he's going to give them a pep talk, "By the by, I like men, like romantically. And sexually. I never told you guys when we were kids because I was too scared that would be the final straw and you'd all leave me behind for good. Anyway, let's kill this motherfucker. 3,2,1 break!"

The words are heavy on his tongue as he sits in the quarry, shakily trying to wash the blood -- Eddie's blood off his glasses.

Richie plays it out in his head, a record playing at 2x speed, "You know, I was in love with him right? Did any of you figure it out?" or

maybe “I loved him, I really loved him, and now he’ll never know” or as a sick joke, because he’s Richie, and that’s all he’s good for, “Remember when they used to call us fags? Flamers? Queers? And we’d always say that’s not us. Well I am! Can you believe it! I was lying about all the pussy I was getting at thirteen!”

None of this comes out. Instead, he just sobs, again. As his friends surround him, the voice in his head goads him “tellthemyou’re gay tell them just say it say I’m gay say it say it say it!”.

He should be able to because it’s fucking 2016, not 1989, and they’re all in their 40s and they have put their lives on the line for each other time and time again. The Losers’ bond goes deeper than any family ever will. They won’t hate him.

But he thinks about how they will view him differently. He will still be Richie “Trashmouth” Tozier, with his bad jokes and big, loud, laugh, but everything about him will be colored different. And right now, when he has lost something, someone so core to his very being, he wants everything to stay the same.

So he makes a joke.

As the rest of them search for his glasses, Richie is left alone again, with his thoughts. He remembers, what feels like months ago but was probably a few days at the most, the incident that started this whole mess, that brought them all back here in the first place. Even now, people like him don’t get happy endings. Especially in Derry. Instead of happy endings, either a part of you dies, or all of you goes. Swallowed up by the Earth and erased by relatives who go quiet when asked about who you are in the family photo albums. If he closes his eyes, he can see the moment Bower’s cousin realizes what kind of boy Richie is. If he closes his eyes he can see the water logged, chewed up body of a young man. If he closes his eyes, he can see the smiling face of Eddie, seconds before everything goes to shit.

He gags on nothing, quietly retching into the water. No one seems to notice.

“God, How selfish can you be?” A quiet, sinister voice whispers in the corner of his mind. *“Oh poor Richie, woe is me! I will never be happy!”*

Well at least we aren't DEAD." It says. It's true. He is alive because of Eddie, who is not. And before Eddie died, there was Stan, and that kid, Adrian, and how dare he bemoan his loss of a "happy ending" when its about losing Eddie, who's own story ended with them dying alone in a sewer? God, if he really wanted a tragic ending he should just--

"Found them!"

He hears Bev's voice call, from somewhere in front of him. Two friend shaped blobs are swimming toward him, and he quickly wipes away the tears clouding his already blurry vision. When she puts them on for him, he sees that the other blob with her is Ben, pulling her into his arms as she smiles up at Richie.

"About time." he thinks grimly.

It's what they deserve, two people he loves dearly finding true love that they deserve with one another. It makes bile rise in his throat. It makes him want to tear his eyes out from his skull.

For a brief moment, he wants to hurt them, to make sure that they are feeling as devastated as he is, even though he knows they already are.

He wants to say, "Get a room you two, some of us are still mourning the death of our best friends and the love of our lives, remember him? From like an hour ago?"

But Richie's forty now, not thirteen, and believe it or not, he has some fucking self control. So instead he just says "Thanks."

The next morning, after the remaining Losers say their tearful, drawn out goodbyes in a diner on Main Street, he stops at a gas station for a pocket knife and drives to the kissing bridge, where he carved the initials R + E into the wood, as a way of telling someone. His scar may be gone, but this oath will stay fresh, no matter how long its been.

Richie didn't have the words at thirteen to explain who he was, he barely has them now. He had crafted such a careful persona that he couldn't remember where Straight Richie ended and the Real Richie began. Everything hung on keeping this persona in tact and his real self hidden. It was why he still had friends, it was why he was still

alive.

That summer solidified what he already knew too well. He had to hide this monster, this predator, growing inside him, but he still had to do something to satisfy it. The kissing bridge provided that release, public but still anonymous. It was the closest he could get to coming out to anyone.

Before doing it, he would fantasize about the different people who might catch him. He had planned it for a week before finally going through with it.

The inner life of Richie was just as chaotic and often terrifying as his day to day life. Leading up to the kissing bridge, almost every waking moment he indulged in the same two daydreams over and over again.

In one, Bowers found him just as he started the “E”, and after kicking him to the ground, used Richie’s own pocket knife to carve some horrible word in his arm. Sometimes he’d fight back, giving Bowers a taste of his own medicine. But usually he just let it happen. It’d be what he deserves after all, he was a dirty little faggot, a disease that corrupts any boy he touches.

The second fantasy, was far more torturous.

This one he knew, would never happen. Not because Eddie was trapped in his house with a broken arm at that point, but because it was just too good to be true.

He would be wiping off the sawdust from his carving when he would hear a familiar voice. Eddie would be watching him from the other side of the bridge, smiling, *knowing*.

In this dream, they don’t have to say what it is. He never, ever has to say it.

But he gets to hold Eddie, and kiss Eddie, and then they would leave Derry and never look back and be free to do whatever the hell they wanted.

“Eds, wherever you are, I...God I hope you’re happy. I hope you’ve got some hypoallergenic angel gowns and you can read all the comics

you want.” He whispers as he runs a finger down the newly carved “E”.

He stabs the pocket knife into the top of the fence when he’s done, as a makeshift shrine to Eddie. If he cries driving to the airport, no one needs to know.

Richie spends the plane ride home in a haze. He can’t sleep, or focus on any of the movies he puts on, and he feels like he’s too big for his skin, bursting at the seams. He methodically rubs his hands on the armrests, looking for the loose thread that will finally unravel him.

The first thing Richie does when he gets home is grab the half-empty bottle of cake flavored vodka he had in the back of his cabinet, and drinks in the shower until his fingers go prune and the water starts to turn cold. When he manages to stand up, he hurls all over himself, and has to stay in there another five minutes to wash himself off.

Since he cancelled the rest of his tour dates, he has nothing to do and the next few days go by in a haze. He doesn’t leave the house, he barely leaves his bed, except to get food, or more booze, or the occasional glass of water.

It’s not that Richie wants to die. Well, he’s not trying to die. Hence the glasses of water. And the food! He’s not trying to die, but he’s doing his best to not not die, too.

Occasionally, he’ll be able to half focus on a show, or a video game, but mostly he lays in bed, and he waits.

He waits for it to finally fucking end.

Derry woke something up inside of him that he can’t turn off again, and his career is as good as over.

His friends love him, but they don’t know him, not really. He’d gained and lost the person he had loved the most in the whole world in the same breath.

His very core is rotten, rotten, rotten, and he lies in bed imagining his rotten self leaking out from a hole in his chest and being able to wake up the next morning finally purged of the disease he has been

festering since he was a child.

He waits to finally feel something again, but he's been stuck halfway between the living and the dead since he left Derry and he's just too damn lazy to finally, really pull the plug.

So he sleeps a lot instead. It's almost as good as being dead.

For the most part, he doesn't dream. Sometimes, he wakes up feeling worse than he did when he went to bed, with his nightmares rattling in his head. Those days are always the worst.

There's one in particular that haunts Richie long after waking.

In this dream. He's in a ballroom. One of those extravagant, gold ballrooms from the regency movies he watches when it's late and he's particularly lonely.

In the middle of the room, arm outstretched, in a pale pink tuxedo and smiling wide, is Eddie.

"May I have this dance?"

In a blink they are dancing, gliding really, through the space. He's there with Eddie and is a spectator of the scene. Dancing and watching himself be led through this room with the only man he's only loved, like it's some kind of twisted first dance at a wedding. There's no music that he can hear, but he can feel the emotional swell of an orchestra as they twirl under the dazzling lights.

"I thought you weren't going to show." Eddie says, reaching up to caress Richie's cheek.

"And miss out on how cute your butt looks in those pants? Eds, who do you think I am?"

They stop dancing, and Eddie stands up on his toes to kiss him. It's perfect. Richie never, wants to not be kissing Eddie. It starts off as several gentle pecks, both of them smiling too much into it to really commit more than that.

The kiss deepens, and Richie feels Eddie's tongue slide into his mouth, and Eddie lets out a groan that sends chills down Richie's

spine.

His grip on Richie is growing tighter and tighter, to the point that it would be painful. Richie's eyes are closed, but he can tell that they aren't in that ballroom anymore. He opens his eyes to find that they're in IT's lair.

"Richie..." Eddie pulls away from him and there's blood oozing from his mouth, blossoming from his chest.

Richie tries to open his mouth to speak, but he too is choking on blood.

"Why didn't you save me?"

Eddie leans in again, staring at Richie with hatred as more and more blood leaks from his mouth.

"Why can't you man up and do anything right?"

Richie barely makes it to the toilet to vomit when he wakes up. He lies on the cold tile of his bathroom after, and tries to calculate how many times he'd need to slam his head into the wall before he forgets everything he's seen.

He's moved his grieving process to the couch for the rest of the evening, because he decided a change of pace in the ceiling he's been staring at will do him some good, when Bev calls him.

"Richie? How're you doing?"

"Mm."

"Is that a good Mm or a bad Mm?"

"You sound like a mom. Jeez Bev, I promise I'm fine." Richie grimaces, picking up one of the bottles of alcoholic orange soda on the floor. That had been a distinct low point. It hadn't even gotten him drunk, just an unpleasant buzz, and an hour of musing out loud about the strawberry phosphate scene from *Our Town*, and then musing about *Our Town* as a whole and how the themes relate to his life, and how he then was finally able to cry himself to sleep.

"Richie? You still there?"

“Unfortunately.”

Bev sighs heavily. He knows deep down she’s worried, because she’s his best friend, and they’re all grieving. Right now, it feels like he’s just letting her down.

“Do you want me to come down there? You can show me your favorite things to do in LA. It’d be fun.”

“That’s real sweet Bevothy, but you’ve got a Ben to take care of, and I don’t want to distract you from all the fun you two are having, together. Anyway, I should actually get going now. OkLoveyouByeeee!!” He hangs up before he can give it a second thought.

Talking never tired Richie out before Eddie died. He could talk for hours about absolutely nothing, until his throat hurt and his jaw ached. Now, after two minutes on the phone, he pulls a blanket over his head and falls asleep, exhausted.

It has been two weeks, one day, three hours and twenty minutes since Eddie died. It is a Monday. Somewhere in his apartment building, a neighbor is watching TV, and Richie is making a game of figuring out what it is.

Two weeks, one day, three hours, and forty-five minutes after Eddie died, Richie’s phone starts blowing up.

He tries to ignore it. There’s been bursts of texts, either from his management team, or from the losers, and half the time, just picking up his phone makes him feel like laying down and taking a nap for ten thousand years. But the notifications keep coming. Finally, when they start calling, he sits up, and grabs it off the coffee table.

Bev Marsh
Missed Call

The Losers Club (55)
iMessage

Mike Hanlon (1)

iMessage

Bev Marsh (20)

iMessage

Bill Denbrough (3)

iMessage

Ben Hanscom (10)

iMessage

He looks at Mike's text first, because he only sent one, except it says to just look at the group chat and respond to the others, so *thanks a lot, Michael*.

Beverly is next.

Have you checked your mail?

Richie! Did you get the letter?

Check your mail!! Call me when you get this!!

Please Richie!

RICHARD TOZIER LOOK AT YOUR STUPID PHONE YOU OLD

MAN

CHECK YOUR MAIL ASAP!!!!

The rest of the individual texts are along these lines. He's not even going to touch the group chat at this point, but shoots Bev a quick text to tell her that he's on it.

As soon as he grabs onto the stack of mail in his mailbox he feels his body tense. He hasn't even seen it yet, but a part of him knows what is tucked in between the Burger King coupons and bills. His hand itches, a phantom pain for a faded scar.

Stan's handwriting is as recognizable as it was when they were thirteen. When he gets back to his apartment, he sits down in the middle of the hallway, and with a shaky breath, opens the letter.

He sits there just staring at it before reading it for a good while. This is the only thing he has of Stan as an adult, and he wants to make it last for as long as he can.

It reminds him of the bar mitzvah speech, and how Stan has convinced him to stay once before. It seems the bastard has done it again.

Richie's eyes keeps going back to two words, towards the end. "Be Proud." "Be Proud." "*Be Proud.*"

He knows it is not that simple. It will never, ever be that simple. But he closes his eyes, and thinks about telling Stan. About how he would react.

He doesn't know what Stan looked like as an adult, so he imagines thirteen year old Stanley embracing him in his gangly arms and saying, "Thank you so much for sharing that with me. I'm proud of you. I'm here for you."

He can't help but laugh at the image. It's the first time he's laughed

in weeks.

Richie wipes away the tears that are gathering in the corners of his eyes. He tries to form the words out loud. He can tell them. He can tell them. It feels like marbles in his mouth, unfamiliar and clunky. He can be serious, and honest. You can't just go back to your hometown, face your greatest fears, and go back home and not try and change your life for the better. Everyone else is doing it, why can't you?

Honestly, he's doing it more for Stan and Eddie at this point than he is himself. They would want him to live an honest life. He can't ever guarantee he's gonna be happy, but he can sure as hell try.

For his friends. For the ones that didn't get to.

He pulls out his phone, and opens up the group chat.

Hey Guys. There's something I want to tell you.

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading! I'm on [twitter](#) if you wanna come hang out and talk about repressed gay man Richie Tozier.